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TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Membership

Representative Jessica Farrar



Biographical Information

Jessica Farrar was first elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1994 and is serving her fourth term as State Representative from northeast Houston. She was re-elected in 2002 for a fifth term which begins in January 2003.

Representative Farrar is currently a partner at Farrar Architects, a firm she shares with her father. A Houston native, she received her Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Houston in 1995. In 1996 she was named an Outstanding Young Alumnus by the University of Houston. Her architectural studies included a year abroad studying in the UH Saintes Program and working with Audinet Architects in Saintes, France. In addition to her architectural experience, she began as a volunteer and progressed to Chief of Staff in the Office of Houston Council Member Ben Reyes. Her formal leadership training includes graduation from the Gallup Leadership Institute. She additionally is participating in the American Leadership Forum and completed both the Flemming Fellowship in 2001 and the Eleanor Roosevelt Global Leadership Institute Fellowship in 2002 from the Center for Policy Alternatives in Washington, D.C. Through the Fannie Mae Foundation, she received a scholarship to the John F. Kennedy School of Government, State and Local Program at Harvard University in July 2001. Also that year, she was honored to serve on the Fannie Mae Foundation Advisory Committee.

Representative Farrar is a board member of the Carrasco Clinic Advisory Committee, the Galveston Bay Foundation, the Rice Design Alliance, Southwestern National Bank, and Texans Against Gun Violence. She was also the State Director for the National Order of Women Legislators and a member of the Women Legislator's Lobby. Other organizations important to Representative Farrar are the American Council of Young Political Leaders, the Harris County Tejano Democrats, and Leadership Texas.

As a member of the House of Representatives, Representative Farrar is on the House Appropriations Committee. In the 76th Legislative Session, through the Appropriations Committee she was able to secure funding to create the Northside Redevelopment Center in Houston. Among its numerous projects, the NRC is now building affordable housing, improving traffic access into the Northside, leading redevelopment efforts of North Main Street, creating early childhood development centers and expanding the bike trail system into the Northside. In the 77th Legislative Session, she was able to increase funding for the NRC. She is currently guiding a partnership with the NRC, the Houston Independent School District and the University of Houston Downtown to turn the old Lee Elementary School into an early childhood development center and teacher training center for both HISD and UH. Other legislative acts include the creation of the Greater Northside Management District which promotes economic development by creating an assessment fee to be paid by businesses and used towards revitalization efforts within the district.

Representative Farrar is also the Vice Chair of the House Corrections Committee. From that committee she passed legislation that makes a sexual encounter between a prison guard and an inmate a state jail felony. She also served in a working group with Texas Department of Criminal Justice staff to establish a comprehensive state-wide approach to alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs with particular interests in education programs and rehabilitation efforts. She continues to pursue educational and rehabilitational services for qualified inmates.

In addition to her committee work, Representative Farrar served as Chair of the Harris County bi-partisan delegation of 31 state representatives. She passed legislation to allow local governments to forgive back taxes on delinquent properties so that non-profit organizations could bid to secure those properties for affordable housing sites. The new housing on the neglected properties in turn alleviates the problems associated with those lots, such as high weeds, litter, rodents and the fact that they are often havens for crime and public intoxication. She also passed legislation to limit child molesters' visitation rights and legislation to ensure consumer rights in auto collision insurance coverage. She introduced a law to ensure timely reporting of a lost or stolen firearm and fought for strengthening penalties for hate crimes. She unanimously passed legislation that was subsequently vetoed by Governor Perry that would clear the criminal records of persons utilizing the deferred adjudication process. This process is utilized for certain defendants such as first-time minor offenses that some youth find themselves committing under a lapse of judgement. If a person completed all terms of the deferred adjudication and maintained a clean record for five years on a misdemeanor and ten years on a felony charge, then their records would have been cleared so that person could pursue housing and job opportunities without fear that their applications would be rejected because of a previous criminal charge. At the present time, qualified defendants enter a plea of deferred adjudication thinking that their records will be clear upon completion of the terms of the court, but soon find this not to be true when their housing or job applications are rejected because of the previous charge. Such persons can currently have their records expunged, but only through a complicated and costly process that most defendants are unable to pursue. When a defendant is unable to obtain employment, such legal costs remain prohibitive. She has re-filed this legislation as H.B. 181 for the upcoming 78th Legislative Session.

Representative Farrar continues to work on issues such as domestic violence, access to higher education, assistance for community development corporations, economic development and youth mentoring programs. In 1998, she began a mentoring program for promising young women called Latinas on the Rise. This program provides Latinas who are juniors or seniors in college with a mentor and seminars aimed at providing them with the tools they need to succeed in the environment of their prospective field. The inception and success of Latinas on the Rise epitomizes her goal of improving the lives of those in her district.

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